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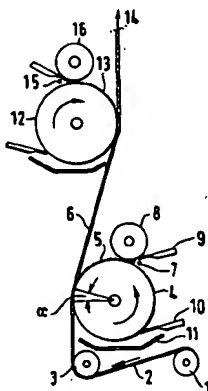
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RESEARCH MAATSCHAPPIJ B.V.**
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NL-2596 HR Den Haag(NL)(72) Inventor: **Tait, Robert Andrew**
310 Southchester**Houston, Texas 77079(US)**Inventor: **Hartley, John Joseph****N24 W30676 golf Hills Drive****Pewaukee, Wisconsin 53072(US)**Inventor: **Stelling, Walter Robert****4444 N. 110th Street****Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53225(US)**Inventor: **Chevako, Donald Michael****7610 N. Applewood lane****Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53209(US)**(54) **Process and apparatus for resin impregnation of a fibrous substrate.**

(57) An apparatus and a process are described for impregnating a fibrous substrate with a thermosettable resin. The process involves the use of resin application means comprising a moving surface on which is positioned a liquid-form thermosettable resin in essentially uncured state, passing a fibrous web in countercurrent contact with the thermosettable resin so as to transfer the thermosettable resin into the fibrous web, and passing the resin-containing fibrous web to a heating zone to partially cure the resin and form a prepreg. The process is particularly suited for application of a solventless resin formulation to a glass web in the preparation of a prepreg for an electrical laminate. The apparatus includes resin application means comprising a movable surface; means for applying a liquid-form thermosettable resin onto the movable surface; means for advancing, in a countercurrent direction with respect to the direction of motion of the movable surface, a fibrous web to the movable surface and in contact with the thermosettable resin thereon and thence to a resin cure zone; and means not in contact with the opposite side of the fibrous web at the point of resin transfer for maintaining tension in the glass web sufficient to promote transfer of the liquid resin film from the movable surface into the interior of the glass web.

**FIG. 1****EP 0 476 752 A1**

This invention relates to the preparation of fiber-reinforced thermosettable resin articles. In a specific embodiment, the invention relates to a process and apparatus for impregnation of a glass substrate with a solventless thermosettable resin system.

The manufacture of the cured thermosettable resin base of an electronic circuit board begins with the impregnation of a fibrous glass substrate with a liquid thermosettable resin system. The resin-impregnated substrate is then partially cured to form a "prepreg." A set of layered prepregs is then heated under pressure to fully cure the resin and to form a hard laminate, which serves as the base for electric circuitry.

Although there exist thermosettable resins, such as low molecular weight epoxy resins, which are liquid at room temperature, current circuit board requirements make it necessary to use high-performance resins systems which are solids or viscous liquids at room temperature and to apply the resins to the substrate in melt or solution form. Attempts to process thermosettable resins in the melt, however, have not been successful because of the difficulty of achieving good "wet-out," or saturation of the fiber by the resin, and also because the high temperatures necessary to melt the resin cause the resin to cure prematurely, further adding to the wet-out problem.

Current commercial processes for preparing prepregs apply the resin to the substrate using an organic solution of the resin. Solution processes must include a step, usually carried out in conjunction with partial curing of the resin, in which the solvent is removed from the prepreg by heating the solvent to its volatilization temperature. Such a process has a number of disadvantages: First, it requires the disposal or discharge of the organic volatiles. Second, volatilization of the solvent from the uncured resin can result in the presence of voids and irregularities in the prepreg and in the cured laminate. Furthermore, a considerable amount of time is required for the solvent removal step. A method for applying resin to the substrate which did not require solvents would thus have environmental, quality and efficiency advantages.

Processes for applying liquid-form resins to the substrate include passing the substrate through a resin bath, as illustrated in U.S. patent No. 4,767,643, and coating a non-porous release sheet with liquid resin and then pressing the release film against the porous substrate to transfer the resin thereto, as described in U.S. patent No. 4,139,591. The former technique suffers from problems associated with the tendency of resin in the reservoir to "advance," or partially cure, if it is not immediately taken up by the substrate, and the latter method suffers from the inconvenience and expense of processing the release sheet. It would be desirable to develop techniques for resins application which do not involve the use of a resin bath or a release sheet.

It is therefore an object of the invention to provide a process and apparatus for impregnating a fibrous substrate with a thermosettable resin.

According to the invention, a process is provided for impregnating a fibrous substrate with a thermosettable resin system, the process comprising:

- (a) providing resin application means comprising a moving surface;
- (b) applying to said moving surface a liquid-form thermosettable resin formulation comprising an essentially uncured thermosettable resin;
- (c) passing a porous web having first and second web surfaces in countercurrent contact with the thermosettable resin formulation on said moving surface so as to transfer the thermosettable resin formulation to the first surface of said porous web and thence to the interior thereof, said transfer being carried out in the absence of external pressure applied to said second web surface area opposite the area of resin transfer to said first web surface;
- (d) passing the resulting resin-containing fibrous web to a heating zone maintained at a temperature effective to partially cure the resin.

Further according to the invention, an apparatus is provided for impregnating a porous web with a thermosettable resin, the apparatus comprising:

- resin application means comprising a moving surface;
- means for controlling the speed of the moving surface;
- resin delivery means comprising a resin chamber and means for depositing liquid-form resin therein onto said moving surface;

means for advancing, at a controlled rate and web tension and in a countercurrent direction with respect to the direction of the moving surface, a porous web to the moving surface and in contact with thermosettable resin deposited thereon; and

means for maintaining sufficient tension in the porous web to enable the porous web to absorb thermosettable resin from the moving surface, said tension-maintaining means positioned so as not to apply pressure to the opposite surface of said porous web as the web contacts the thermosettable resin on the moving surface.

The process of the invention provides a technique for impregnating a fibrous substrate with a liquid-

form thermosettable resin. The process of the invention is particularly suitable for impregnating a glass web with a solventless resin system in the preparation of a prepreg for ultimate use in electrical laminates.

The process involves contacting an advancing fibrous substrate with a liquid-form resin positioned on a moving surface and transferring, by countercurrent contact, the resin from the moving surface to the fibrous substrate and into the interior thereof. As used herein, such a fiber application process involves impregnating the resin into the interior of the fibrous substrate and is to be distinguished from coating only the exterior surface of the substrate. The object of the resin application process of the invention is to achieve thorough wet-out of the substrate by the liquid resin and to thereby permit the fabrication of a high-quality cured laminate from the resin-impregnated fibrous substrate.

In the resin application process according to the invention, a fibrous substrate is impregnated with a liquid-form thermosettable resin. Although the process of the invention can be practiced with solvent-borne resins, the preferred resin system is one which does not contain an organic solvent, which includes both water-borne resin systems and solventless resin systems. For a solventless resin system, the liquid form can be achieved by use of a thermosettable resin which is a low-viscosity liquid at room temperature or which has been heated to a temperature effective to achieve sufficiently low viscosity for thorough wetout of the substrate. In the latter case, of course, the resin system (the thermosettable resin and any curing compounds used therewith) must not cure to any substantial degree at its melting temperature over the length of time of the substrate impregnation process.

The resin application process and apparatus of the invention can be described by reference to Figure 1. Figure 1 is a cross sectional diagram of a preferred embodiment of an apparatus according to the invention. The substrate 2 in web form, generally any porous material in chopped, mat or woven form, preferably a web of woven glass fibers, is advanced from delivery means 1, which will generally include automatic means for advancing the web at a selected rate and with a selected web tension. The fibrous web is optionally heated by, for example, infrared heaters, prior to advancement to the resin application zone. Guiding means 3 is positioned to direct the web toward resin applicator roll 4 at a predetermined arc of contact α . Angle α can vary depending upon the overall configuration of the application scheme, but will generally be within the range of from 20 to 90 degrees, preferably of from 20 to 40 degrees, most preferably of from 25 to 34 degrees in the embodiment shown. Resin application means 4, which can be, for example, an endless belt or a roller and is shown here as a roller rotating in a counterclockwise direction, delivers liquid resin film 5 to a first surface of web 2 passing counterdirectional thereto. Applicator roll 4 is maintained at a temperature effective to keep resin film 5 in essentially uncured, liquid form. This temperature will vary depending upon the resin, but will generally be within the range of from 50 to 200°C. The speed of rotation of applicator roll 4, the tension in web 2 as it contacts resin film 5, and the speed at which web 2 is advanced to the applicator roll are coordinated to provide good wetout of the web. These specifications can vary widely depending, for example, upon the resin system, the type of web material, and the heating capacity of the downstream B-staging unit. In general, the speed of rotation of applicator roll 4 will be within the range of from 70 to 125 percent of web speed, preferably of from 90 to 100 percent of web speed; the tension in web 2 will generally be within the range of from 0.179 to 0.537 kilograms per linear centimeter, preferably of from 0.27 to 0.36 kg/cm; and the speed of advancement of the web through the resin application zone will be within the range of from 2.4 m/min to 61 m/min, preferably of from 15.3 to 45.8 m/min.

Resin film 5 is applied to applicator roll 4 by means of resin delivery means, shown here as a combination of set gap roll 8 and nozzle 7 capable of applying a controlled quantity of liquid resin to the rotating surface of the applicator roll. Nozzle 7, represented here in cross-section, can be a tube whereof the axis is parallel to the length of the roll, having one or more exit ports for application of the liquid resin system to the roll. Blade 9, located closely adjacent the area of resin application to roll 4 and in contact with set gap roll 8, can be used to prevent movement of newly-deposited resin on the surface of roller 8 as it rotates and to define a small well or bead of active resin in the set gap area. Nozzle 7 can be associated with any means for continuous delivery of the resin in liquid form, at either ambient or elevated temperature. Delivery of the resin will be carried out at volume rates synchronized with the speed of the moving web so as to deliver a predetermined volume of resin to the web and to minimize residence time within the resin delivery system. Resin delivery means can include, for example, a temperature-controlled static blender or a mixing extruder with an outlet into nozzle 7.

Metering means, shown here as a set gap roller 8 located between nozzle 7 and the point of contact of resin film 5 and the advancing web, is used, in conjunction with resin delivery means 7, to control the amount of liquid resin which is delivered to the web. Set gap roll 8 is preferably a smaller-diameter roll than applicator roll 4 so as to permit a generally vertical alignment of the set gap roll and the applicator roll and to minimize residence time of the liquid resin prior to application to the web. Control of the rate at which

resin is applied to the web is achieved in the first instance by careful setting of the gap between set gap roll 8 and applicator roll 4 so as to maintain a uniform film thickness 5. Secondly, the rotational speed of the applicator roll is coordinated with web speed so as to achieve transfer of the resin film onto the moving web. In addition, because no backup roll is employed to control the contact of the moving web with the applicator roll, control of web tension is maintained to ensure stable operation of the resin application process.

Resin removal means 10, shown here as a scraper blade located above discard trough 11, serves to remove from the applicator roll any resin which remains on the roll after contact between resin film 5 and advancing web 2, as any resin which has remained on the roll for a complete rotation is likely to have undergone excessive cure for application to the web.

Resin-containing web 6 is advanced to optional second resin application means 12, shown here as a roller rotating in a direction counter to that of first roller 4. Second roller 12 can be used to smooth the second surface of the resin-impregnated web and can, if required, serve the optional function of applying additional liquid-form resin 11 to the web as desired to increase prepreg resin content. This second roller can optionally be heated. In the embodiment shown, liquid resin, the quantity of which is controlled by nozzle 15 and set gap roll 13, is applied to resin-containing web 6 to increase the resin content of the web and to fill in any interstices or voids in the resin-containing web. Roller 12 can serve the additional (or alternate, if no resin is applied to the web at this point) function of smoothing the resin on the surface of the web as the web is advanced toward cure zone 14. It is preferable to pass the resin-saturated web directly to the cure zone without cooling thereof by cooling means such as chilled rollers, for example.

Second application means 12 is positioned between first application means 4 and cure zone 14. The web travel distance between the applicators can vary depending upon the other process variables, including the resin formulation, web porosity and web speed, but this distance will generally be within the range of from 0.30 to 1.52 meter, preferably of from 0.30 to 0.91 m. The resin application process is carried out in the absence of pressure applied to the web opposite the area of resin transfer from the applicator to the web. In certain conventional resin application processes, such pressure is applied by a backup roll contacting the web surface (or a release sheet in contact with the web surface) opposite the surface through which resin is being applied. In the invention process, such applicator backup rolls are undesirable, since said backup rolls may introduce too much strain in the web surface causing it to rupture. The use of a release sheet is an option with the single-roll embodiment of the invention process, but is not necessary or, in general, desirable in the practice thereof.

The wetout of the web by the resin is achieved partially by pressure-driven flow at the applicator roll 4, but mainly by capillary action within the web. The capillary-induced flow of resin into the web depends upon the viscosity and surface tension of the resin as well as the porosity of the web and surface tension of the web fibers. For impregnation of conventional glass web styles, resin formulations having viscosities within the range of from 0.05 to 0.6 Pa.s, typically 0.1 Pa.s, and resin surface tension within the range of 250 to 400 $\mu\text{N/cm}$, typically 32 $\mu\text{N/cm}$, can be used. Resin infusion times will vary of from 0.1 second to 0.5 second under typical conditions. For a web speed of 65 m/min, for example, the web will move approximately 0.5 m in 0.5 seconds. Therefore, to ensure complete wetting of the web before it reaches the second applicator roll 12, at web speeds of the order of 65 m/min, the second applicator roll 12 will typically be positioned so that the points of web contact at applicator rollers 4 and 12 are approximately 0.7 m apart. Of course, modification of the process conditions and resin characteristics will require modification of the applicator specifications, including the distance between applicator rolls.

Resin delivery means designed for use in the resin application process and apparatus of the invention can be described with reference to the schematic drawing in Figure 2. Resin from reservoir 20 maintained, by optional temperature control means 21, at a predetermined viscosity is passed via conduit 22, pump 23 and conduit 24 to mixing means 31, shown here as a static blender with internal blending baffles. Control system 29 delivers the desired proportion of resin and curing agent to the mixer, which is coordinated with the line speed of the web through the resin application zone by variable speed electric drive system 37. Curing compound(s) in reservoir 25 maintained, by optional temperature control means 26, in liquid form are passed via conduit 27, pump 28 and conduit 30 to mixing means 31, wherein the resin component and the curing component are intimately mixed at a controlled temperature maintained by temperature control means 32. The mixed resin formulation passes via nozzle 33 to applicator roll 35 and set gap roll 34, shown here with associated temperature control means 36, of the resin application apparatus described above.

The prepregging process of the invention can be described in general terms by reference to the flow diagram presented in Figure 3. Fibrous web 43 is delivered to resin application zone 44 by a suitable automated web advancement system 42 with means for measuring and controlling advancement speed and web tension. Web tension control devices are known in the art. For example, unwind roll 41 can include a

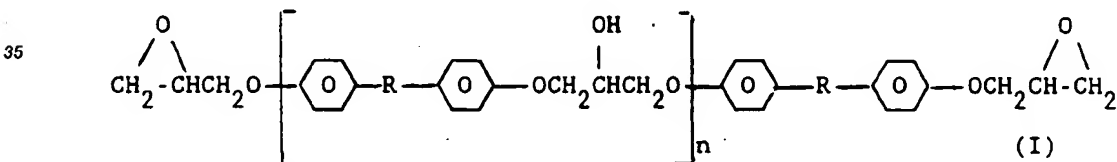
brake which, in combination with a front-end dancer roll, maintains a preset web tension programmed into a pull-in unit located between the dancer roll and the resin application zone. Similarly, proper downstream web tension can be maintained by a dancer roll which moderates the speed of a variable-speed constant-diameter roll located downstream from the heating zone.

5 The fibrous web is advanced through resin application zone 44, which is here shown in the preferred generally vertical orientation, in which the web passes in a generally upward direction as liquid resin is applied by the method described in detail above. Application zone 44 includes resin delivery means, including a mixing portion for blending the resin and curing system, and temperature control as necessary to maintain the resin system at the desired viscosity.

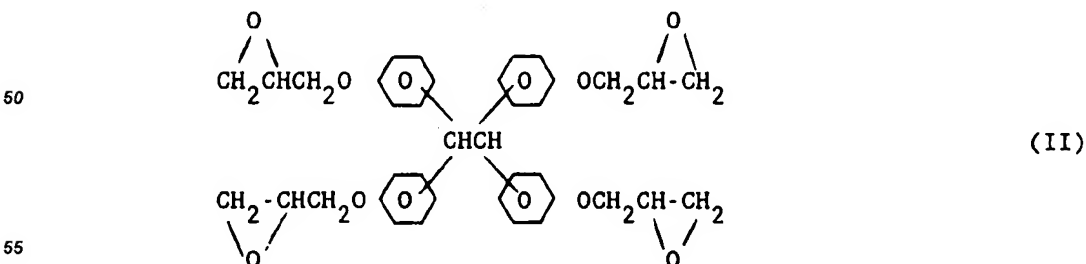
10 Resin-saturated web 45 is advanced from the resin application zone to resin cure zone 46, typically a forced air heated treater, wherein the resin-saturated web is treated, by exposure to elevated temperature or UV radiation, for example, to partially cure the resin without gelation, a process known as "B-staging." The temperature in the treatment zone will vary depending upon the resin system and the degree of resin cure desired, but will generally be within the range of from 80 to 200 °C, preferably of from 120 to 180 °C. The resin-saturated web will be subjected to the B-staging treatment for a time sufficient to impart the desired degree of cure, generally of from 30 seconds to 8 minutes. The web is advanced from resin treatment zone 15 46 in the form of a prepreg 47, which is rolled at uptake roll 48 for storage or, alternatively, is passed directly to lamination.

A laminate is fabricated by subjecting a set of layered prepreps to conditions effective to cure the resin and to integrate the prepreps into a laminated structure. The laminate can optionally include one or more layers of a conductive material such as copper. Laminating conditions generally include a time of from 30 minutes to 4 hours, preferably of from 1 hour to 2 hours, a temperature of from 160 °C to 300 °C, preferably of from 170 °C to 200 °C and a pressure of from 3.4 to 34 atm. The laminate can optionally be "post-cured" by heating at a temperature of from 200 to 230 °C at ambient pressure for 1 to 6 hours to improve thermal properties.

Thermosettable resins which can be used in preparing electrical laminates include epoxy resins, imide resins, cyanate resins, propargyl ethers, and blends and reaction products thereof. The currently favored resins, because of their low cost and cured properties, are epoxy resins, alone or blended with another resin. Suitable epoxy resins for electrical laminates include glycidyl ethers of dihydric and polyhydric phenols. Exemplary diepoxy resins include those which are prepared by the base-catalyzed reaction of a 30 bisphenol and an epichlorohydrin and can be represented by formula I:



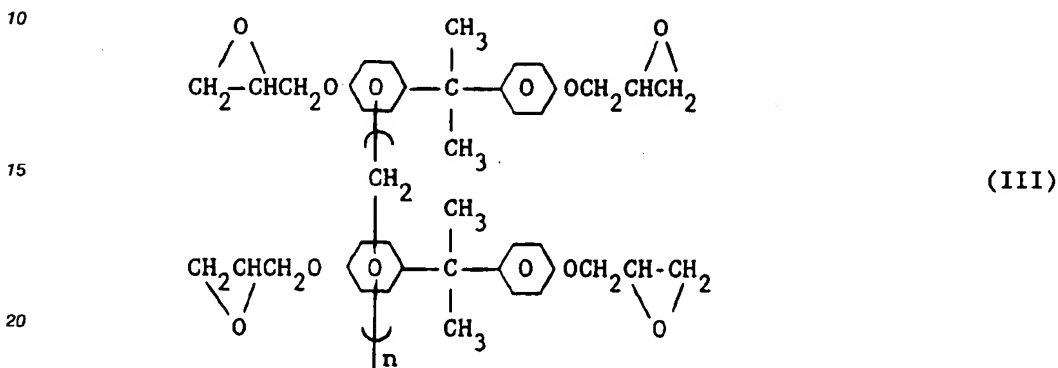
40 in which n is zero or a number greater than zero, commonly in the range of 0 to 10, preferably in the range of 0 to 2, and R is methylene or 2,2-propylene. An example of a suitable epoxy resin component is EPIKOTE 1123 (EPIKOTE is a trademark), a brominated diglycidyl ether of bisphenol-A having a molecular weight of 800. Also suitable as the epoxy resin component are multifunctional glycidyl ethers of the tetraphenol of ethane, as represented below by formula II. Such multifunctional epoxy 45



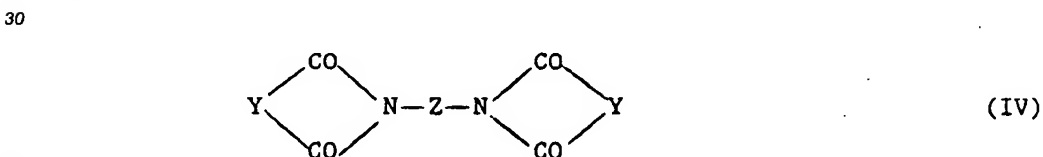
resins are available commercially as EPON Resin 1031 from Shell Chemical Company. Other suitable

resins can be prepared by the reaction of epichlorohydrin with mononuclear di- and trihydroxy phenolic compounds such as resorcinol and phloroglucinol, selected polynuclear polyhydroxy phenolic compounds such as bis(p-hydroxyphenyl)methane and 4,4'-dihydroxybiphenyl, or aliphatic polyols such as 1,4-butanediol and glycerol.

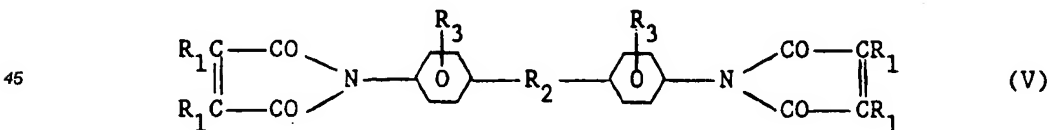
- 5 The epoxy resin component of the composite can also be novolac-based epoxy resins ("novolac epoxy resins"), which are the glycidyl ethers of the product of reacting a phenol, such as phenol, cresol, resorcinol or bisphenol-A, with formaldehyde in acid solution. An example of a suitable class of bisphenol-A novolac epoxy resins is represented below in formula III.



Other thermosettable resins, alone and in combination with epoxy resins, can be processed into laminates by the process of the invention. Such thermosettable resins include, for example, cyanate esters, propargyl ethers, and vinyl esters, and blends of such resins with epoxy resins. Highly suitable thermosettable resins for electrical applications include imides such as bismaleimides and trismaleimides. Preferred bismaleimides include N,N'-bisimides of unsaturated carboxylic acids which can be represented by the formula IV:



in which Y is a substituted or unsubstituted divalent radical containing at least 2 carbon atoms, preferably 2 to 6 carbon atoms, and a carbon-carbon double bond, and Z is a divalent radical containing at least 1, generally of from 1 to 40 carbon atoms. Z can be aliphatic, cycloaliphatic, aromatic or heterocyclic. A preferred class of bismaleimides is derived from an aromatic diamine and can be represented by the formula V:



in which each R₁ is selected independently from H, C₁₋₂ alkyl or halide; R₂ is selected from divalent hydrocarbon radicals containing of from 1 to 6 carbon atoms, -O-, -SO₂-, -COO-, -CONH-, -CO- and -S-S-; and each R₃ is selected independently from H, C₁₋₃ alkyl and halide.

Examples of such bismaleimides include

- N,N'-4,4'-methylene-bismaleimide
 N,N'-4,4'-ethylene-bismaleimide
 55 N,N'-hexamethylene-bismaleimide
 N,N'-meta-phenylene-bismaleimide
 N,N'-p-phenylene-bismaleimide
 N,N'-4,4'-diphenylmethane bismaleimide

- N,N'-4,4'-diphenylether bismaleimide
- N,N'-4,4'-diphenylsulphone bismaleimide
- N,N'-4,4'-dicyclohexylmethane bismaleimide
- N,N'-4,4'-(3,5-diphenylpyridine) bismaleimide
- 5 N,N'-pyridinidi-2,6-Y bismaleimide
- N,N'- α,α' -4,4'-dimethylenecyclohexane bismaleimide
- N,N'-meta-xylene bismaleimide
- N,N'-4,4'-diphenylcyclohexane bismaleimide
- N,N'-meta-phenylene bisdichloromaleimide
- 10 N,N'-4,4'-diphenylmethane biscitraconimide
- N,N'-4,4'-(1,1-diphenylpropane) bismaleimide
- N,N'-4,4'-(1,1,1-triphenylethane) bismaleimide
- N,N'-4,4'-triphenylmethane bismaleimide
- N,N'-3,5-(1,2,4-triazole) bismaleimide,

15 and various N,N'-bismaleimides disclosed in U.S. patent Nos. 3,562,223, 4,211,860 and 4,211,861. Bismaleimides can be prepared by methods known in the art, such as described in U.S. patent No. 3,018,290, for example. The imide can also be a trifunctional maleimide reaction product of a bis(aminobenzyl)aniline with maleic anhydride. For laminating applications, the imide will preferably be blended with an epoxy resin in an amount within the weight ratios of from 1:9 to 9:1, preferably of from 1:1 to 9:1.

20 An epoxy resin-containing laminating composition will include a curing agent. Effective curing agents for epoxy resins are known to include, for example, amines, acids, anhydrides, phenols and imidazoles. The presently-preferred curing agents for imparting optimum laminating properties to epoxy compositions are phenolic compounds which have a phenolic functionality greater than 1.75. The preferred phenolic curing agents are phenolic novolacs prepared by reacting a dihydroxy phenol such as resorcinol or bisphenol-A
25 with formaldehyde in acid solution. The preferred phenolic novolac resin curing agents are bisphenol-A novolacs having a weight per phenolic group (WPP) of from 60 to 500, preferably of from 60 to 300, and, on the average, more than 2 phenolic hydroxyl groups per molecule, preferably of from 3 to 5. Such phenolic novolacs are available under the tradename Epikure DX-175 from Shell International Chemical Company (Epikure is a trademark). The phenolic novolac curing agent will be present in the composition in an amount
30 effective to cure the epoxy resin, which will generally be a stoichiometric amount of from 0.75 to 1.25 equivalents per equivalent of epoxy resin. In terms of weight percent, the curing agent will be present in an amount generally from 10 to 70 weight percent, preferably of from 15 to 50, most preferably of from 15 to 40, based on the combined weight of epoxy resin and curing agent.

The curing agent, for flame-proof applications, can be a mixture of the phenolic resin curing agent and a
35 brominated phenolic curing agent. The brominated phenolic curing agent can be any monomeric or polymeric compound having at least one free phenolic hydroxyl group and one or more bromine atoms on the aromatic ring. Examples of suitable brominated phenolic curing agents include for example brominated bisphenol-A novolac, brominated phenolic novolac, brominated polyphenylene oxide, brominated bisphenol-A and brominated bisphenol-A carbonate. The brominated bisphenol-A will be present in an amount
40 effective to increase flame retardancy, generally an amount up to 40 weight percent, usually of from 2 to 15 weight percent, based on the combined weight of epoxy resin and curing agent(s).

In order to promote faster and/or lower temperature cure of the resin components of the composition, an optional cure accelerator may be used. Many suitable accelerators, such as ureas, tertiary amines, imidazoles, phosphenes, octoates and boron trifluorides, for example, are known in the art. The presently
45 preferred class is imidazoles such as 1-methyl imidazole, 2-ethyl imidazole, 2-methyl imidazole, 2-methyl-4-ethyl imidazole and isopropyl imidazole. Because of its availability and performance characteristics, 2-methyl imidazole is the preferred accelerator. The accelerator will be present in the composition in an amount effective to increase the cure rate and/or lower the cure temperature of the composition, generally in an amount of from 0.01 to 7, preferably of from 0.05 to 3 weight percent, based on the weight of the
50 composition.

The thermosettable resin system must be designed within certain specifications dictated by the resin application process parameters. The resin formulation must be a liquid at a temperature at which the resin does not undergo cure over the time necessary for application of the resin to the substrate. The resin system must be of sufficiently low viscosity that it achieves good "wetout," or saturation of the web, without
55 the use of a backup roll at the point of application. Once applied to the substrate, however, the resin system must have sufficient viscosity that it does not drop from the resin-containing web before it reaches the heating zone. Resin formulations having viscosities in the range of from 0.1 to 1.0 Pa.s, preferably of from 0.1 to 0.6 Pa.s are most suitable. The currently preferred resin system is a blend of a diglycidyl ether of

bisphenol-A having an Epoxy Equivalent Weight (EEW) of 175-185, a brominated diglycidyl ether of bisphenol-A having an EEW of 310-350 and a bromine content of 30-50%, a phenolic novolac curing agent, and 2-methylimidazole accelerator.

The process of the invention can optionally be practiced with a thermosettable resin formulation which includes an organic solvent or diluent present in an amount effective to decrease the viscosity of the system for ease of processing. Polar organic solvents such as ketones, alcohols and glycol ethers, for example, are suitable. The chosen solvent will generally have a boiling point less than 160 °C. The preferred solvents for epoxy resins are ketones such as acetone, methyl ethyl ketone and methyl isobutyl ketone, for example, and solvent mixtures of these with an alkylene glycol ether such as propylene glycol monomethyl ether. The proportion of solid components in the composition can vary widely depending upon the amount of the other constituents present and the intended application of the composition, but the solvent in a solvent-borne system will generally constitute of from 15 to 50 weight percent of the total weight of the formulation.

Example 1

This example describes the preparation and testing of a solventless thermosettable resin system to determine its suitability for use in the invention prepreg preparation process. The resin component was prepared by charging 41.0 g brominated diglycidyl ether of bisphenol-A and 59.0 g liquid diglycidyl ether of bisphenol-A (EEW 178-186) to a heating vessel and stirring under nitrogen at 120 °C for 30 minutes. The curing agent component was prepared by heating 98.3 g of a phenol-formaldehyde novolac (HRJ-1166 from Schenectady Chemicals, WPP 103-105) to 120 °C, adding 1.73 g of 2-methyl imidazole, and mixing at 120 °C for 30 minutes. The resin formulation was prepared by blending the resin component and the curing agent component in a weight ratio of 72:28.

A laminate was prepared under laboratory conditions simulating conditions of resin delivery and application to a glass web to confirm that the viscosity and cure characteristics of the resin formulation met processing requirements for the invention resin application technique. The viscosity of the above blend at 100 °C was 0.9 Pa.s. The blend was mixed at this temperature for 3 seconds to simulate mixing in an extruder barrel. The resulting blend had a gel time (measured at 140 °C) of 89 seconds and a viscosity at 120 °C of 0.6 Pa.s. After mixing at 120 °C for 3 seconds to simulate one-side web application, the gel time (140 °C) was 85 seconds. The blend was applied by a hand squeeze-rolling technique to woven glass (style BFC 7628) and partially cured in an oven for 2 minutes at 163 °C for simulation of a conventional treater oven B-staging operation. The dust gel of the B-staged resin (140 °C) was 40 seconds, confirming advancement of the resin.

A prepreg produced in this manner was made into an eight-ply laminate by pressing at a pressure of 13.6 atm and holding at a temperature of 175 °C. Heat-up and cool-down rate for this operation were maintained at 14 °C/min. The laminate had the following properties:

Flexural strength (23°C, atm)	4.9 . 10 ³
Flexural modulus (23°C, atm)	2.41 . 10 ⁵
Tg (°C, DSC)	152
Dielectric constant (23°C, D-24/23)	4.47
Volume resistivity (.10 ¹³ ohm-cm)	290
Water absorption (1 hr 1.02 atm steam, %w)	0.22
Copper peel (28.4 g Cu, kg/cm)	1.56
Flammability UL-94	VO

Example 2

This example demonstrates application of a solventless resin system to a glass web using the process

of the invention on a laboratory scale. A single-side coater was constructed using an adjustable experimental coating apparatus. The applicator roll diameter was 20.3 cm. A 2.54 cm Meyer rod was used to define a gap through which the resin was metered prior to contact with the web. The applicator roll was rotated at a surface speed of 2.44 m/min, and the Meyer rod was rotated at 0.305 m/min. The applicator roll surface was heated to 120 °C. A flexible, porous woven glass fabric web (1080 glass style) 20.3 cm in width was fed to the roller at a rate of 3.05 m/min. The resin formulation described in Example 1 was deposited onto the applicator roll using a hot-melt dispensing pump operating at 100 °C. Resin was applied to the cloth to provide a resin content of 67 %wt. The resin-containing web was passed through a 4.57 m oven maintained at 140 °C to B-stage the resin. The dust gel (measured at 171 °C) for B-staged resin removed from the prepreg was 34 seconds. The prepreg was used to make a 16-ply laminate by pressing at the following conditions:

rate of rise (°C/min)	2.8
maximum temperature (°C)	175
pressure (atm)	6.8
time at temperature (hrs)	1
cooldown rate (°C/min)	22

The laminate had the following properties:

Flexural strength (23°C, atm)	$3.62 \cdot 10^3$
Flexural modulus (23°C, atm)	$1.43 \cdot 10^5$
Tg (°C, DSC)	135
Volume resistivity ($\cdot 10^{13}$ ohm-cm)	240
Laminate appearance	clear, uniform, good adhesion to glass, some voids

Claims

1. A process for impregnating a fibrous substrate with a thermosettable resin system the process comprising:
 - (a) providing resin application means comprising a moving surface;
 - (b) applying to said moving surface a liquid-form thermosettable resin formulation comprising an essentially uncured thermosettable resin;
 - (c) passing a porous web having first and second web surfaces in countercurrent contact with said thermosettable resin formulation on said moving surface so as to transfer said thermosettable resin formulation to the first surface of said porous web and thence to the interior thereof, said transfer being carried out in the absence of external pressure applied to said second web surface opposite the area of resin transfer to said first web surface;
 - (d) passing the resulting resin-containing web to a heating zone maintained at a temperature effective to partially cure said thermosettable resin.
2. A process as claimed in claim 1 which further comprises between steps (c) and (d):
 - (e) providing a resin application means, comprising a second moving surface, between said first resin application means and said heating zone;
 - (f) applying to said second moving surface a liquid-form thermosettable resin formulation comprising an essentially uncured thermosettable resin;
 - (g) passing the resin-containing web from step (c) to said second moving surface in countercurrent contact with said thermosettable resin formulation on said second moving surface so as to transfer said thermosettable resin formulation to the second surface of said resin-containing web, which transfer is effected in the absence of external pressure applied to the first web surface opposite the

area of resin transfer to said second web surface.

3. A process as claimed in claim 1 or 2 which further comprises passing a first stream comprising a liquid-form thermosettable resin and a second stream comprising a curing agent into a mixing chamber wherein said first and second streams are blended to form the liquid-form thermosettable resin formulation, and depositing said formulation onto said moving surface(s).
4. A process as claimed in any one of the claims 1 to 3 in which said resin application means comprise(s) (each individually) (a) roller(s) or (a) belt(s) moving at a speed within the range of from 70 to 125 percent of the speed of the web.
5. A process as claimed in any one of the claims 1 to 4 in which the porous web is passed in contact with the moving surface(s) at a speed within the range of from 15.3 m/min to 45.8 m/min.
6. A process as claimed in any one of the claims 1 to 5 in which the arc of contact of the porous web on the resin application means is within the range of from 20 to 40 degrees.
7. A process as claimed in any one of the claims 1 to 6 in which the moving surface is maintained at a temperature within the range of from 50 to 200 °C.
8. A process as claimed in any one of the claims 2 to 7 in which the respective points of contact between the porous web and the first and second moving surfaces are within the range of from 0.30 to 1.53 m apart.
9. A process as claimed in any one of the claims 1 to 8 in which the web is maintained at a web tension within the range of from 0.45 to 1.35 kg per 2.5 cm.
10. An apparatus for impregnating a porous web with a thermosettable resin, the apparatus comprising:
 - resin application means comprising a moving surface;
 - means for controlling the speed of the moving surface;
 - resin delivery means comprising a resin chamber and means for depositing liquid-form resin therein onto said moving surface;
 - means for advancing, at a controlled rate and web tension and in a countercurrent direction with respect to the direction of the moving surface, a porous web to the moving surface and in contact with thermosettable resin deposited thereon; and
 - means for maintaining sufficient tension in the porous web to enable the porous web to absorb thermosettable resin from the moving surface, said tension-maintaining means positioned so as not to apply pressure to the opposite surface of said porous web as the web contacts the thermosettable resin on the moving surface.
11. An apparatus as claimed in claim 10 which further comprises a resin application means comprising a second moving surface positioned in a generally upward vertical position with respect to the first resin application means; resin delivery means comprising a resin chamber and means for depositing liquid form resin therein onto said second moving surface; means for advancing said second moving surface in a counter direction with respect to the direction of the first moving surface; and means to direct the porous web from the first moving surface to the second moving surface in countercurrent contact between the second surface of the porous web and the second moving surface.
12. An apparatus as claimed in claim 10 or 11 in which said resin delivery means comprise(s) a nozzle for depositing the thermosettable resin onto the moving surface and means for forming the deposited thermosettable resin into a film prior to contact with the porous web.

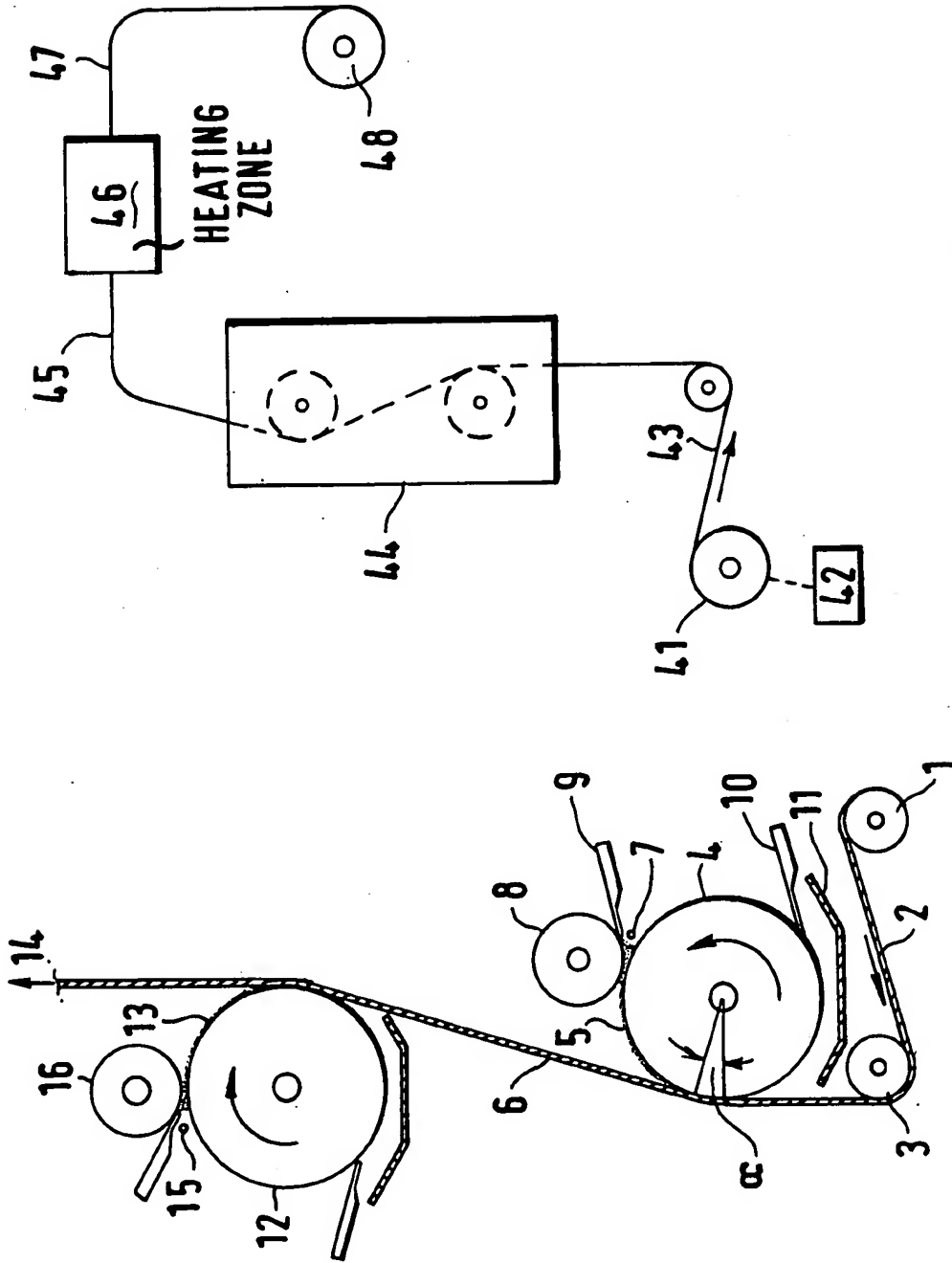
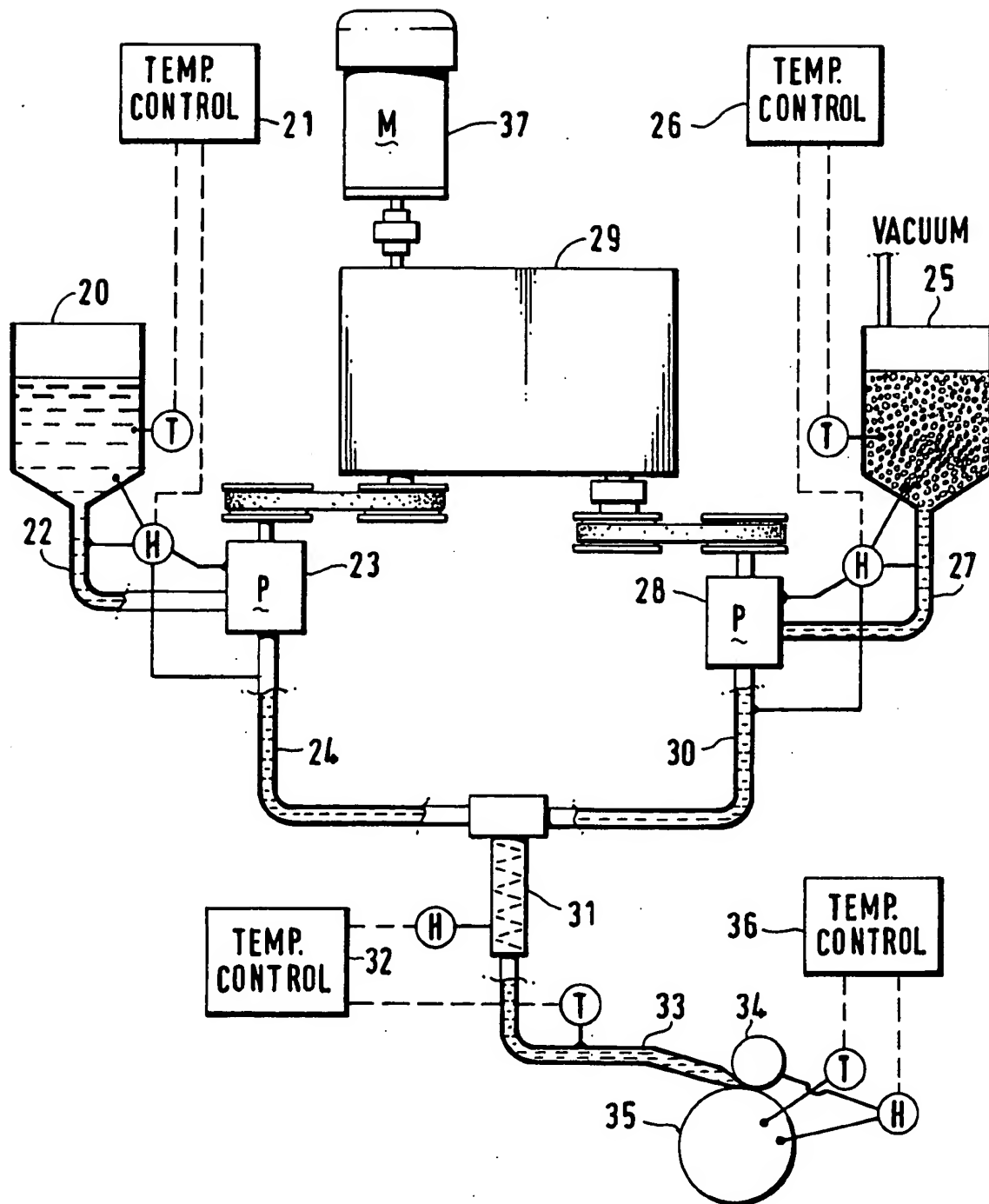


FIG. 3

FIG. 1

FIG. 2



EP 91 20 2318

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl.5)
A	EP-A-0 272 104 (AMOCO) * column 2, line 8 - line 50 *** column 3, line 34 - line 41 ** - - -	1-12	B 29 B 15/12
A	DE-A-3 344 990 (MESSERSCHMITT-BÖLKOW-BLOHM) * page 8, paragraph 2; figure 1 ** - - -	1-12	
A	GB-A-2 055 057 (GAF) * figure 1 ** - - - - -	1-12	
			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int. Cl.5)
			B 29 C B 29 B
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search	Date of completion of search	Examiner	
The Hague	16 January 92	VAN WALLENE A.M.A.	
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X: particularly relevant if taken alone Y: particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A: technological background O: non-written disclosure P: intermediate document T: theory or principle underlying the invention		E: earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D: document cited in the application L: document cited for other reasons &: member of the same patent family, corresponding document	